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The Black Cat

June 1897.

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The Man-Hunt of Mendocino.

BY FRANK BAILEY MILLARD.

WE were all glad in the stage-coach when two passengers got out at San Ramon. The coach had been carrying three men on a seat, and for the last eight miles the two San Ramon passengers had been sitting in the laps of the others, turn and turn about. It had seemed to me that my turn with the stout man had been unfairly protracted, and with him on my knees, I had begun to understand something of the discomfort of a cattle-car. I was particularly unhappy when the big wheel on my side jumped into a rut or banged against a stone.

My fellow-man and brother is all very well at his proper distance, and I can venerate him there, but when he crowds me he is only a bag of live meat.

The wild Mendocino mountain-side with its brave army of straight pines meant something for me when the burden was off, and as I straightened out my stiffened legs, the loud-talking stream that lay along our dusty way spoke up to some purpose. I was alive again.

The driver seemed jollier, too. He plucked from the sides of trees letters that had been visible only to his eyes, letters stuck to

twigs or bark by the rustics, and he joked about Sam's tender missive to Sarah, for he knew all the people up there in the mountains, and all their affairs and affections.

We made a wild dash down a red hill, whose sides were gashed by the road, and spattered the water in the creek at the bottom. Then we were submerged in the gloom of a grove of thick-growing redwoods that made a high-vaulted roof for the road and shut out all but the merest splinters of sunlight. It was cold in there and sinister — just a bit ghostly and gruesome, too — and it smelt of rotten leaves. We made a sharp turn around a big black stump, and the lead horses jumped in fright to the left. For there was a spectral figure standing in the deepest shadow behind the stump — the slight, bent form of an old woman.

"Ah, Mis' Chapman! Goin' to take a trip?" asked the driver, pulling up.

"Yes," shrilled out the high, thin voice of the specter. "Goin' down to Covelo."

"Git right in, then. Plenty room, ain't there, boys?" And he laughed as if the joke were on us, which it was.

She seemed a bit dismayed as she looked inside from the step, to which one of the outside men had helped her.

"Seems kind o' crowded," she said, "but I guess I can squeeze in somewhere."

Surely enough, her lean figure fitted into a little corner, and she sat there as composed as she might have sat in her own rocking chair. She was dressed in deepest black, and wore an ancient black bonnet. Her face was one of extreme sadness.

I looked out of the coach window as we started again, and saw the house where she lived. It was a black little affair, with its shaked roof and weather-stained sides. It stood out of plumb, as if bowing to the big black stump across the way. There was a little patch of sunshine on the top of the stump, but not a glimmer on the house. The poor habitation looked as if it had never known morning or noon, but always the twilight of the redwood deeps, to which the darkness of night is merely one of degree.

"Lived there long?" asked the passenger who had made most interrogations along the way. Though curious, he was a sympathetic man, and with the question went a tone of pity.

"Yes, 'leven years; mostly alone, too. It's a good cool place in hot weather."

The woman did not seem to like to talk, but shrank into herself and kept her sharp, pale face turned aside, while her eyes went low. I knew a story belonged to that face.

Two miles were soon rattled off, and we came to Covelo and sunshine, for we were well out of the redwoods. The old woman was helped down, and three other passengers got out. A big rancher shook hands with the woman when she alighted, and said something to her that brought over her face what was possibly meant for a smile. Then the rancher clumped into the stage in a large, lumbering way, and we rattled out of Covelo. The rancher seemed to know nearly all the people in the stage.

"So you picked up Mrs. Chapman coming down? She's a good old soul, isn't she? But she has a strange history."

"What's her story?" I asked. "I know it must be as good as Maupassant."

"Don't know the gentleman, but it's a good one, all right," said the big rancher, who seemed to be a man of parts, though he smoked a very bad cigar.

"She came to the redwoods before they had a sign of anything at Covelo or San Ramon either. I guess it was long before any of you thought about coming to this country. She's a remarkable woman, gentlemen, and no mistake.

"You see, she and her husband came to Mendocino County and took up a timber claim about a dozen years ago. The husband died, but she had a boy left — a young man about twenty, I should say. She thought the world and all of that boy. He was a bit rough, like most of us then. We hadn't got so infernally civilized by that time as we have now, and we didn't give people those toplofty hand shakes with the heart all out of them.

"Lloyd Chapman could handle an ax with the best man of the woods, and he was liked by everybody. His mother was wonderfully proud of him. Young as he was, though, he had that old-man look that comes so early to wood-choppers.

"There came a time when I had to do some tall lying on Lloyd's account. You see, he got to running down to Sam Ramon

and over to Old Pike's place, 'ginning up,' as the boys called it, and he'd do this nearly every week. So, when Mrs. Chapman would ask me, with a worn, sitting-up-late look on her face, if I'd seen Lloyd, I'd always lie the young rascal out of it somehow or other, saying he'd got an extra job of wood-hauling up San Gabilan way, or something of that sort. She didn't know the boy drank, and he had sense enough not to come home until he was sober. But it hurt me to see him get started that way. And so, one day, I just held him up where I met him on the road and talked to him like a French stepfather.

"'You've got to stop it right away off, young man,' I said. 'You'll wind up by breaking your poor old mother's heart if you don't. Besides, I'm not going on lying for you always.'

"I think I can be eloquent when there's any great occasion for it; and I felt this to be the real occasion, and so I was uncommonly eloquent. My words reached him.

"'Well, I'll quit it,' said he, striking his side with that big hand of his. 'I'll swear off right here and now.'

"'That's good,' I said, and drove on, with my pride in my eloquence swelling up like water in an artesian well.

"Not very long after that Lloyd went over San Miguel way, where he got a job at the big lime kilns. They were all fine fellows over at the kilns — all except one, Joe Kendrick. He was just about Lloyd's age and looked like Lloyd a good deal — same color of hair and eyes, and just about Lloyd's build. The two young fellows got quite chummy, went to live in the same cabin, and were always seen together about the kilns.

"Just about that time a piece of calico came into the camp — the foreman's daughter — Jess Haymond. They say Jess was a wonderfully pretty girl, and had eyes that were like a stroke of paralysis for some of the boys. Lloyd and Joe fell so deep in love with her that neither of them knew which end he was standing on half the time. She seemed to favor Lloyd more than anybody else at the camp, but Joe was in the race to win. Joe thought he was solid, so he pulled himself together and asked her to marry him. Jess was very sorry, but she was promised to Lloyd. That was enough. Joe was wild. He quit the cabin, wouldn't speak to Lloyd again, and went about with a black look

for everybody. He drank very heavily, too, and talked a good deal about shooting. I happened to be at the camp just then and before I went home I told Lloyd to keep his eyes open and his pistol handy. But it was like talking to the wind. He wasn't afraid of anybody.

"'It would be a good time to take a run down to the redwoods and see your mother,' I said. 'She must be very lonesome there. She hasn't seen you for more than a month, you know, and you used to be home nearly all the time.'

"'Oh, you want me to run away from that limber-jawed lime burner, don't you? I'm no turn-tail,' said he with fine contempt.

"It was no use. I couldn't make him see, what all the camp saw, that his life wasn't worth a sprig of rattle-weed, with that half-crazed Kendrick oiling up his gun and shooting at all kinds of targets down by the creek.

"I went home past Mrs. Chapman's, and she asked a good many questions about her son. She had heard very little from him since he'd taken up with Jess Haymond, and she was getting anxious. She made me stay there an hour or so, telling all about Lloyd and whether the work was too hard on him, and whether he got enough to eat. She said she'd heard lime burning was very rough on the eyes, and she wanted to know if he wore the old goggles she had sent him, and that had belonged to his father. She showed me a wonderful red jacket that she had knitted for him. She had been at work on it for weeks, and it was nearly finished. I never knew a mother with so much feeling for a son, and now that he had quit drinking and was behaving himself decently, I felt he was really worthy of it.

"She grew so lonely there in the redwoods that she came near setting out for San Miguel to stay awhile at the camp, where she could be near her son, but she said it was rather hard for her to get about, so she waited. He had promised to come home about Christmas time. It seemed he was waiting to see her before he told her anything about that girl of his — probably thought telling her now by mail would make the poor old soul more lonely than ever. I believe he thought, too, that she'd be a bit jealous.

"And so it went on to the night of the big wind. It was a night that everybody round here remembers, for the country got

a good sweeping that time, and no mistake. It was a dismal night for the old woman, you may believe. She didn't go to bed, but sat up all night and heard the howling of the big blasts as they tossed the gray tops of the redwoods together, and down went a tree here and there with a crash. The wind always made her fidgety, anyway, and now her nerves were sadly strained.

"Well, in the midst of a lull she heard a clatter of hoofs, and a young man rode up wild and hot, and begged of her to hide him, for the sheriff was on his trail. He had no hat or coat, and his shirt was nearly cut off him by falling trees. He had been drinking a little up at San Ramon, he said, and had got into a shooting scrape. The best pistol handler in the camp had set upon him, and it was one life or another. The old woman listened to him, and, seeing how like he was to her own son, and overlooking his carouse, as she had often done Lloyd's, she argued to herself that it was all right, and that it was lucky her own boy had never got into such a scrape. Had he done so, she would have thanked the one who saved him. Besides, it was a matter of self-defense.

"She hurried the young man into a very small attic, the entrance to which was over the kitchen. Then she gave his horse a cut with a switch, and he ran down the road, leaping a fallen redwood here and there, but making ahead at a good gait.

"Turning, she saw four horsemen dash up, with hard-breathing beasts under them. They were the sheriff and three other men from San Miguel. None of them knew her. They asked her if she had seen a young man go by there. Maybe it was her side look when she told them 'no' that made them search so carefully about the place. They had ridden so hard that their horses needed blowing, so they waited there awhile and continued their search about the house and the little outbuildings by the light of a lantern they had borrowed from her. By this time the wind had gone down and the woman had come to herself, for what with the tempest and the man-hunt she had been wildly flustered.

"'You'll not find him in the chicken house, nor in the woodshed, nor in the well!' she fired up at them. 'I tell you nobody has stopped here to-night. You're only losing time, for now I think of it, when the wind was highest I heard something that sounded like horseshoes running down the road.'

"Then she sat down limply on the back step, for the brave speech had cost her breath and nerve.

"So, after taking another look through the house and darting a glance up the little attic hole from which she had taken the ladder while they were outside, they at last threw their legs over their horses and dug in their spurs to such purpose that they soon overtook the horse, which had settled down to a quiet walk.

"They were in open country and the moon was up. There were no fresh tracks, though the ground was soft and they could have seen them by sharp searching. As one stirrup was flung over the saddle, they saw that the horse had come some distance with no rider.

"It was getting along toward daybreak now, and two of the men came back and camped at a little spring in front of the house, where they took another rest. The old woman saw them from between her shutters, but she did not go out, for her man was still in the attic. He had not dared to come down, as he had been expecting another part of the posse to pass along. Surely enough the party did pass just about sun-up, hailing the men at the spring with, 'Ain't given it up yet, have yeh?' To which the reply was, 'Oh, he's off in the redwoods somewhere. He isn't fool enough to trot along a stage road in broad daylight.'

"The men at the spring hung around for three or four hours. They didn't go near the house, but just stayed where they were, guarding the road and waiting for the sheriff to come back.

"Meanwhile the old woman got breakfast, and passed some ham and eggs, some bread, and a good strong cup of coffee up to her lodger in the attic.

"At last the sheriff came back with the whole troop of man hunters, and they all rode off down to a trail a mile back which they thought the murderer might have taken.

"Rather than risk another search, the woman told the man in the attic that he had better get out now and make up the old back trail for the hills. So down he came, shaking in fright, and looking around as cautiously as a wood-rat.

"It was a chilly morning after the storm, and he looked cold and pinched. So she out with the very jacket she had knit for her boy, and handed it to him. 'The left sleeve ain't quite done,' she said, 'but the jacket's good and warm.'

"He pulled it on, and, with a mumble of thanks, — he had hardly spoken to her since his first coming,— sneaked out the back door, and up through the redwoods toward the hills.

"Men that she knew came along with axes and saws and cleared the stage road. They seemed to fight shy of the cottage, but one, a warm-hearted Irishman, made bold to come in and offer her his sympathy in 'the hoor o' yer disthress.' She looked at him with a woodswoman's intuition of evil. What had happened? She shrank in terror from his words, but she would have them.

"Then he told her, with well-meant but crude and heart-stabbing speech, that her son Lloyd had been slain by a man named Joe Kendrick, up at the kilns — shot in the back without warning. He described Kendrick, and kept up a running river of words of pity and purposed consolation.

"She did not sink upon the floor, nor fall into her chair, nor cry, nor moan; but she ran to the fireplace and took down a repeating rifle that hung there, and ran like a girl of fifteen up the trail toward the hills. All the forenoon she followed that trail, tracking the man like a hound. All the afternoon she kept on over the hills and among the great rocks where she knew the slayer of her son was hiding.

"At last, spent by her unwonted effort, her old limbs quivering under her, and her back aching cruelly, she sat down on a rock. She was faint from want of food, and her throat seemed as dry as the coarse, wrinkled skin of the back of her hand. For a little while she closed her eyes and bent her head on her arm that lay on the sharp granite. The torturing vision was plain before her, even with shut eyes, — her boy lying dead with that bullet hole in his back.

"The shadow of the rock crept gently over her and shielded her gray, thin-haired head from the wicked sun. A brown lizard looked at her with an eye that held something of pity. A gray coyote stealing up, paused in plain discomfort. She of the redwood deeps, unused to the scorching heat, drooped there on the dry hill like a withered flower.

"A little breeze came down and rustled a manzanita bush at her side. She opened her eyes, and below her, beside a rock, not more than fifty yards away, was a red something. She stared

hard, her poor eyes strained and unwinking. She knew the blotch of red for the jacket she had knitted for her son. She could tell that shade among a score. And that red jacket clothed the breast of her son's murderer! She breathed a soundless laugh, her face lighting with joy. But when she lifted her rifle her arm shook so that its loose stock rattled in her hand. She crouched in the shadow behind a lower surface of the rock, and the rifle stole cautiously into place, resting there firmly.

"She shut one eye and glanced along the barrel through the peep. Her arm hugged the stock lovingly. Thrice the bead went by the peep, and she felt that her hard breathing was marring the sight. So she held her breath, and soon the bead was fairly in front, with just a little rim of red above it. Her finger that had been fondling the trigger all the while now pressed it quickly. There was a crack, and a smoke-puff passed away on the breeze. She looked eagerly at the man in the red jacket, but he still sat there, leaning against the rock. So she quickly threw out the empty cartridge shell, drew her bead and fired again. Still the man in the red shirt sat there, his face staring up at her and mocking her. As carefully and deliberately as before she fired another shot. Yet there was no movement of the red jacket.

"She put her withered hand to her brow and pressed it hard. Then she rose and stole cautiously down the rocks and through the chaparral, carefully watching the figure before her. When she came down to it she saw that the head was tilted back a little so that it rested on the rocks. The eyes were wide open.

"In the breast of the red jacket were three bullet holes.

"That's all, gentlemen, and here we are at Fort Bragg."

Silas Bartle's Snake-Bite Cure.

BY WINTHROP PACKARD.

HE road from Greenmeadow Station to Puckanuck stretches a sinuous length of sand through a landscape varied with scrub-oak knolls, huckleberry pastures, brown hay fields, and here and there a remnant of pine wood whose resinous breath fills the summer noon with an essence of heat. It is such a road as you will find in almost any New England town, and the carryall that the lazy buckskin horse was drawing along it was as much to the manner born as was the yellow-maned phlegmatic animal himself. Two girls sat on the front seat; the elder was tall and slender, with an air of habitual seriousness and reserve, while the other was barely of medium height, with a plump figure, a round, richly colored cheek, and a pair of black eyes that could melt with tenderness or snap with energy as the agile soul behind them might direct. Just at present they snapped.

The elder sister sat erect holding a tight rein, and now and then jerking on the bit. The other held a short stub of a whip in her hand, and with this feeble weapon she was belaboring the tough hide of the buckskin horse, whose steady and very moderate progress was in nowise accelerated by the action.

"Oh, dear, Dick!" she was saying. "I'm so sorry (whack, whack)! but I can't help it, you've got to go along (whack).

"Get up there, you (whack) pachyderm (whack, whack)! O Dick, I (whack) hate to hurt you (whack), but you must hurry up."

"It doesn't hasten him one bit, Kitty," said the other; "but we may have time enough. We can go to-morrow, anyway."

"I don't wish to go to-morrow, and we shall have time to go to-day, if this monument to perversity will only wake up. Get up, Dick, I tell you!"

"I'm sure I don't care much about seeing it, anyway," said the other.

"Carrie Mackintyre, you shan't discourage me (whack). Get up, I say! It's all a part of the country and I wouldn't miss it for anything. We shall have to take Mr. Norris, I suppose."

"Humph!" said the elder sister. "Couldn't we go somewhere else as it is Mr. Norris that makes the trip desirable?"

Kitty shot a swift glance at her sister. "You know very well that I do not care for Mr. Norris except that he will make a good escort where we must have somebody," she said.

The good Puritan fathers, with faith as stern as their rock-bound fields, set their stubborn wills to the grubbing of those rocks, and with grim utility fenced the fields with them. There, to this day, they bind quaint parallelograms in rough fetters, whose unkindness is soothed with gray moss, garlanded with hard hack and meadowsweet, and thrilled with the touch of velvet-lipped wild-rose blossoms. Of such was Bartle's farm with its nondescript buildings planted at the end of a narrow lane. Its usefulness, declining with the decline of agriculture in New England, had revived somewhat when the courage and tact of Mrs. Bartle had caused it to be surrounded with a wide piazza and advertised as a summer boarding house.

Thither wandered each year a few people from the city, and thither was tending the yellow-maned buckskin horse, with his nerves unstirred by the persistent energy of his drivers.

On the shady side of the piazza, with an unopened magazine on his knee, was George Norris, busy thinking — of Kitty Mackintyre. This was nothing new. It had been his occupation, with occasional intervals for rest and refreshment, for a year or more. Yet he had had opportunities for action, too, and he had used them. Again and again he had brought the witching little gipsy to the verge of tenderness, only to be mocked, or skillfully evaded at the last moment, and obliged to school his temper to further patience. Patience he had in most affairs, and pluck, and, above all, a stubborn devotion to principle. Kitty came first in his heart, then the law, which was his business, and last, devotion to total abstinence principles, which was his hobby. He was not aggressive about this last, but he was very much in earnest.

There were no total abstinence principles about Silas Bartle. Indeed, his thirst was as a green bay tree, which would certainly have been mildewed from excessive irrigation had not long experience taught him a great respect for his wife's opinion. But it had taught him, and Silas was never seen intoxicated.

In fact, cunning, the armor of the weak, had so long been his breastplate that few people, and certainly none of the boarders, knew of his bibulous tendencies. Like the farm, his usefulness had long ago declined; but, unlike his farm, it had in no wise revived, and his wife held undisputed sway indoors and out, her sharp voice now and then spurring him to a momentary and delusive energy, although, like the buckskin horse, his cuticle was unsensitive and inured to hardship through long usage.

Just now Silas was hard at work, watching the five kittens feed at the barn door, where they crowded about a pan of milk.

"Thar," said he, "that's jest the way of the world. Thar's the big feller with both feet and his face in the pan, and thar's the little feller crowded out so't he can't git in smellin' distance on't. Thar now, I thought so! Jest 's I'm gettin' down to solid business 'long comes them boarders 'n want the horse put up."

Thus grumbled Silas as the buckskin horse came steadily into the yard, with both girls sitting quite primly behind him, although the eyes of the younger sparkled with eagerness.

"Mr. Norris," she called, "we want you; and O Mr. Bartle, we are going to drive down to Scotch Woods to see the rattlesnake they have caught, and we want the horse till tea time, and you must tell us the way, please. They said it might be gone to-morrow. You would like to go, Mr. Norris? Would you, really? Well, perhaps we can make room for you. You will have to drive in penalty for your rashness in accepting such an invitation. I? Oh," with a mirthful glance at her sister, "I shall hold the whip."

It was a pleasant awakening from dream to reality to be thus calmly appropriated by the girl he loved, and Norris's heart beat high as he took a seat in the carriage, inwardly resolved that he would speak and she should listen that afternoon.

"So they've got a rattler, hev they?" asked Silas advancing leisurely. "They don't of'n get one on the hill nowadays, tho'

they used to be common enough. Kinder like to see him myself. Ye don't know whar he is? Scotch Woods? Wal, Scotch Woods goes along quite a piece. What d'ye say if I go along on the ol' bicycle an' inquire the way for ye?"

Kitty laughed gleefully. "Oh, do!" she cried. "We have never seen you ride that bicycle, and I'm sure it will be such a help to us in finding the way."

A few moments after, Silas rode from the lane mounted high on the seat of an old-fashioned ordinary bicycle, whence his long legs dangled to the slowly moving pedals, and followed by the carryall and its merry freight. Mrs. Bartle saw this procession, but not in time to interfere, and it faded into the Scotch Woods road unmolested.

Kitty was more than commonly bewitching. Her light thought glanced from theme to theme, and she treated Norris with a goodfellowship that made him wish that the journey was to last forever. More than that; there was a spice of challenge in her manner that marked a mood that was new to him. So, once, she caught the reins just above his hands and stopped the only too willing Dick, saying: —

"O Mr. Norris, see those flowers; gerardia, are they not? See, in the woods." And Norris, thrilled with the warm, velvety touch, brought back the stately spires hung with half-inverted golden bells, only to find my lady very demure and withdrawn within the fortifications after what he had thought a sortie.

From time to time they found Silas looming leanly from his lank machine, propped up against a telegraph pole waiting.

"Ye see," he said apologetically, "I can't ride as slow as Dick travels, to save me, an' I guess these telegraph poles is jest about right for stations along for me to wait for ye at."

Scotch Woods did indeed "go along quite a piece," and the end of their journey was still a little farther off when they came to a long hill.

"Reckon I'll hev to climb this at one gasp," said Silas. "They ain't no way to start good on a hill."

Then Carrie leaned from the carriage. "There are some clethras by the roadside, just ahead," she said; "I will walk up the hill, if you please, Mr. Norris, and gather some."

Silas pedaled laboriously on up the hill, and as Carrie drew ahead of the slow-moving horse Norris felt that his opportunity had come. He turned to his companion with a look in his eyes, — the old masterful masculine look which, blended with a grave tenderness, the woman instinct knows so well,— and took her hand. "Kitty," he said.

One who has given his life to the acquisition of wisdom, who has been married twice and should certainly know much of the ways of women, tells me that Kitty knew that George Norris loved her, and that she had meant that he should tell her so before their return to the city, which was to be in a day or two; but even this wise one cannot tell why, now that the time for the saying of it had come, she did not wish to hear it. The little hand slipped from Norris's as if it had melted in the warmth of his grasp, and its owner glanced hurriedly about for a way of escape.

"I — Mr. Norris — " she said, "see, there are some cardinal flowers in the field. They will go so nicely with the gerardia. Will you not get them for me? Carrie," she called, as Norris hesitated, loth to give up the advantage of the situation, "do you not see the cardinals? Mr. Norris will get them."

Norris went on his second botanical expedition with less of enthusiasm than he had carried to the first, yet with a good grace. This elusive quality was no new thing to him, and in spite of his disappointment he found it charming. Then, when he returned the others were hidden by a bend in the road, and he had another and better chance. This time, as Kitty took the flowers, she lost both hands. Nor did she withdraw them. A wistful look stole the mischief from her eyes, and Norris felt the day to be his. But before either could speak wistfulness followed mischief from his sweetheart's face, and she cried, "Look! Look!"

For some reason Silas had turned at the top of the hill, then had lost control of his wheel, and the figure that came sailing down, with an expression of whimsical terror on its face, and wildly waving legs that sought the pedals in vain, was enough to disturb any semi-engaged couple. Finally, with a last frantic grasp at nothing, Silas sprawled at the very feet of the unconcerned horse.

"Oh!" cried Kitty, "he's hurt. Go help him up." And

Norris sprang from the carriage. But Silas scrambled to his feet without assistance, felt first of the unharmed bicycle, then of his elbow and knee.

"Sho!" he said sheepishly, "I ain't hurt; been off that bicycle good many times. I vummy, I didn't calk'late to do that, though."

And now, as they resumed their journey, Norris was treated to a new phase of the maidenly mind. Kitty, the mischievous, the wistful, the all-but-won, became cool and distant to such a degree that the older sister lifted her brows in surprise, and Norris's hopes had a downfall compared with which that of Silas was as nothing; so that by the time they reached their destination he was more in doubt and nearer to despair than ever.

It was a little old house with an unfenced front yard, and the snake was in a box outside. The top of this box was covered with a thin wire netting giving light and air. An old lady appeared at the door as they came up, and said that the boys were away, but they could look at the snake if they wished to. The boys had caught it while berrying. It had been lively at first, but now seemed torpid. No, it had not tried to bite any one, still — "I guess ye'd better not handle him much," suggested Silas, "though he doos seem kinder peaceable."

It is difficult to describe what followed. Kitty had never fainted away in all her life; Dick had never run away in all his; and yet in a few seconds Kitty fainted, Dick ran away, and an appalling disaster had befallen the merry party,— and the way of it was this. It was with a little nervous laugh ending in a shudder that Kitty had leaned over the box and looked at the reptile within. Norris had been by her side, while Carrie stood a little farther away, and Silas was just leaning his wheel against a convenient telegraph pole a few steps beyond Dick, who stood placidly whisking flies. The clumsy body had stirred slowly within the box and a shrill, weird rattling filled the air.

Just then there was an exclamation of horror from the older sister. Kitty had sunk on her knees by the side of the box, one arm lay across it and her cheek almost brushed the top as she leaned forward, unconscious of her danger. She had fainted.

With a cry Norris caught her away, then slipped and, falling against the box, involuntarily put out one hand to save himself,

thrusting it with their combined weight through the netting full against the reptile beneath.

There was a sharp hiss, again the singing rattle, a thrashing sound, and he rose to his feet bearing the unconscious and unharmed girl on one arm, while from the other he threw, with a motion of desperation, the clinging, baleful curves of the snake. Full in Dick's face he threw it, and in a second the terrified horse was galloping wildly up the road.

There are moments of horror when we seem bereft of the power of motion. For a few seconds each member of the little group stood as if frozen in the positions in which the event found them; then Silas sprang to the woodpile, and seizing a stick, dashed at the snake which lay defiantly coiled in the roadway, and with little grunts of execration beat it into a crushed and bleeding mass.

Carrie turned to her sister, whose fluttering eyelids gave evidence of returning consciousness, and Norris let his burden sink gently in her arms, and stood looking with a curious dazed expression at two little marks on his left hand. He was bitten; he knew that, but it did not seem as if this could be he. It was rather as if some other man were standing there with a queer little numbness in his hand, and he were outside the group, looking on as one does in reading of a thing, realizing the horror, but not feeling it personally. The rattle of distant wheels, and the hoof beats of the runaway horse, came over the trees with the breath of the late summer afternoon. A belated locust shrilled from a near-by tree, and an over-ambitious fall cricket chirped from the shady side of the door stone. He tried to think, tried to shake the daze of sudden horror from his brain and to realize what had happened, but he could not, and it was the voice of the old lady which partially recalled him to himself and identified the disaster to the others.

"Oh, the gentleman's bit!" she cried. "Here, you," rather savagely to Silas, who stood in the attitude of conquering hero over the motionless reptile, "take that wheel of yours and go for a doctor. The gentleman's bit."

Silas turned to the wheel, which lay like a broken-backed bird in the wagon track. "I can't," he said ruefully; "the team's

busted it, the horse's run away, an' th' ain't no doctor nearer'n Milton Mills, an' that's a good five mile." Then, with a sudden inspiration, "Here, whisky! Why didn't I think? Whisky'll cure it!" And he drew from his hip pocket a comfortable flask. "I allers carry a little on't with me," he added somewhat sheepishly. "It — it's handy in case any one's sick, ye know."

A sigh from Kitty drew Norris's attention. He forgot his own misfortune in bending over her as the light came back into the dark eyes. "Are you better?" he asked gently.

"Yes," she replied, sitting up. "What has happened? Oh, I remember," with a shudder, "that dreadful snake!" Then as she caught sight of Norris's face, "Why do you look so?" she asked. "Are you hurt?"

Again the voice of the old lady had a reviving effect. "He's bit," she said, "and he'll die. Here,"— this to Silas,— "why don't you stir your stumps and do something? The gentleman's bit."

But Silas stood motionless, gazing at the flask, evidently cracked in the fall from the bicycle, and empty save for a few drops of amber fluid and a pungent aroma. He shook his head mournfully, with a flourish of the empty flask. But Kitty had regained her feet. A faint flame of color flushed the May white of her cheek, and there was a glint of determination in the glorious depths of her eyes. Coquetry had vanished, and she drew proudly to her lover's side and took the wounded hand tenderly in both her own.

"He must not die," she said, "for I love him."

Then the older sister spoke. "I do not think the bite is necessarily fatal," she said; "I have studied medicine a little, and I know something about poisons. Will you take off your coat, Mr. Norris, please?" Her face was pale but her voice was steady, and there was that in it which insured obedience.

Norris's thought was confused in a whirl of emotion. Life and death seemed to stand on either hand and mock him; life in the joy of Kitty's yielded love, death ignominious and painful, each defying the other. His hand was hardly swollen and as yet he felt no pain. He bared the wrist and forearm. "A tourniquet?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Carrie; "we must keep the poison out of the

circulation if possible. Mr. Bartle! Mr. Bartle!" she called; but Silas had disappeared into the house with the old lady. Norris whipped out his handkerchief. He was conscious of a feeling of numbness, and the voices of the others seemed to come to him as if from a distance. They bound the handkerchief loosely about his arm and then gave several turns with a bit of stick, until the folds cut firmly against the flesh. Finally Kitty bound the stick in place with her own light handkerchief.

"That is the best we can do for now," said the elder sister. "Now, Kitty —" But Kitty did not answer. Instead, she threw one round arm beneath that of her lover and urged him toward the doorway.

"Quick!" she said; "sit down here." She was none too soon, for faintness had drawn the color from his face till it was white to the lips. She knelt beside him while Carrie hastened to the well and brought water. Just then there was a whoop of triumph from the house, and Silas rushed out, nearly falling over the group in his haste, brandishing a pint bottle in one hand, while he held several others pressed to his breast.

"Hooray!" he shouted. "It's all right now. Here's enough to cure a half dozen snake bites. I never see the time yet I couldn't find whisky if thar was any. Now, you keep giving him that. Make him drink it all. It'll keep him up while I go for the doctor. Make him keep a-drinkin' it." And Silas started for Milton Mills at a gait which Puckanuck people afterward heard described but utterly refused to credit.

Kitty took one of the bottles from the step where Silas had placed them. After one or two attempts she forced the fastening, and, filling a glass which the old lady had brought, she offered it to Norris, who had roused a little. "Drink this, dear," she said. "Drink it all."

"What is it?" asked Norris feebly.

"It's whisky," replied Kitty; "it will keep you up till the doctor comes. Mr. Bartle said so. He has gone for the doctor. Drink it, please."

Norris looked at the glass which his sweetheart was holding to his lips, then he put it gently to one side. "Dear," he said, "I cannot drink it."

Kitty clung to him and pressed it on him. "Oh, please!" she pleaded; "just once. It is medicine. It is to save your life."

Norris hesitated a moment, but again he shook his head. Never had life seemed so sweet to him; perhaps it might be his still, life with Kitty, if he would drink — and yet —

"Mr. Norris," — it was the elder sister who spoke now, — "I think you would better drink it. Come," she said, with a wan little smile; "you are my patient now and you must take my prescription. And I prescribe whisky, whisky *ad nauseam*."

Still Norris hesitated. His hand and arm were growing numb now. Probably the terrible paralysis of the poison was creeping into his veins in spite of the bandage. He looked at Kitty wistfully. She loved him. If he might live for her. Kitty saw the look and clinched the matter.

"George," she said, "I am willing to marry a man who — drank — once — to save a life. Surely you ought to be willing to be that man. Do you wish to marry me? If you do, drink this at once."

Norris held out his hand for the glass. "Dear," he said, "it is for your sake," and closing his eyes he drained the glass with a celerity which would have caused Silas open-eyed amazement. "Faugh!" he said; "what a vile taste! But it warms one."

Kitty poured another glass, and yet others, and Norris drank them at short intervals.

"Do you feel — does it affect you?" asked Carrie after the third of the pint bottles had been emptied.

Norris shook his head. "It does not seem to go to my head at all," he said. He did not like that fact. It seemed that the snake venom was still more powerful than the liquor, and he asked for more of the latter. His hand and arm seemed a little swollen below the tourniquet and felt unpleasantly numb, yet there was as yet little real pain. The fourth bottle was empty now.

"Do you know," he said, "I begin to feel the way I did when I was a boy at school and they dared me to take the two parts of a Seidlitz powder separate — and I did it."

Kitty looked at her sister in alarm. "He is beginning to be delirious," she said, and she made him drink another glass.

The calm sun shone with late summer fervor on a haggard group,— Kitty at intervals plying her lover with the liquor she was so sure meant the saving of his life, the elder sister keenly watching the patient and ministering to his needs as best she might, while the old lady filled the time with voluble grief at the misfortune that had overtaken the stranger within her gates.

But Silas returned far sooner than they had hoped. There was a sound of hoof beats, a tattoo of blows, and the recreant Dick galloped back into the yard at much the same pace at which he had left it. Silas drove, while on the back seat sat two boys.

Kitty sprang toward the carriage. "The doctor!" she cried; "have you brought the doctor?" But the grief and excitement of the old lady overflowed at sight of the two boys, the first cause of all this trouble, and she flew toward the carriage, half dragged them out, and poured forth a torrent of reproaches which for a time drowned all else. Silas interfered.

"Excuse me, marm," he said, "but ye don't want to jaw them boys too much. They've brought me the best news I've heerd for a good while. Ye don't want no doctor, and Mr. Norris ain't goin' to die of no snake bite, either. Mr. Norris," he said, "I reckon ye're so boozy by this time ye can't rightly take it in, but that snake ain't hurt ye one bit. He jest couldn't do it."

Norris rose unsteadily to his feet. "What — what do you mean?" he asked.

For a moment Silas's eagerness was drowned in a wave of admiration. "Wal, wal!" he said; "ye be a good one, a tarnation good one, to carry all that and be able to stand."

But the impetuous Kitty almost pulled Silas from the carriage.

"He will live?" she said. "You say he is not hurt? How do you know?"

"Oh, he's all right," said Silas; "ain't he, boys?

"Ye see, these fellers met Dick up the road a piece and stopped him. They druv this way an' pretty soon they met me nigh tuckered out, runnin' so fast. An' so they took me in an' tol' me all about it."

"All about what?" cried Kitty. "How could —"

Here the elder of the two boys spoke for the first time. "We were going to sell him to the dime museum people," he said,

"but they wouldn't take him unless his poison teeth were taken out. So we got the natural history feller from the village up here yesterday, and he took 'em out real cute; he caught his head in one hand with a glove on it and pulled 'em with a pair of pinchers. Naw, he couldn't hurt no one, that snake couldn't."

The boys were paid for the loss of their menagerie, and arrangements were made for getting home the broken bicycle. As they were about to drive away Kitty's eye fell on the bottles by the door-stone, and she leaned from the carriage, saying: —

"Boys, will you do something for me, please?"

The boys felt the sweetness of her blush and the charm of her voice, and said: "Yes, miss, certainly."

"I wish you would throw away that whisky that is left in those bottles," she said; "and promise me never to use any such thing. It is dreadful to do it, you know. Will you promise?"

The boys looked at her in unconcealed amazement. "What whisky," asked the elder, "that in the bottles? That ain't no whisky, that ain't. That's jest ginger pop."

Silas dealt the buckskin horse a resounding whack. "Get up," he said; "I got to be gettin' 'long home to ten' to them cats."

During the long drive Kitty and her sister had time for exchanging gleeful recollections of the cheerful pop with which each cork had been released from its wire fastening. But Silas spoke only once, and that was in an undertone, evidently intended for no ears but his own.

"Ginger pop!" he said; "curin' snake bite with ginger pop; Wal, Silas Bartle!"

Tunnel Number Six.

BY EUGENE C. DERBY.

EXTENDING for thousands of feet beneath the earth's surface, joined by a vast labyrinth of tunnels and leads, the great iron mines of Maitland, New South Wales, still yield their riches to the hardy toilers with sledge and bar, just as they have done for scores of years already past and probably will continue to do for centuries to come.

Yet deep down in that mammoth excavation there is a vein of the richest magnetic iron ore, where the miners never strike a blow and where visitors are rarely shown. This remarkable lead is locally designed as The Haunted Vein,— why and with what appropriateness may be judged from the following bit of history, which has never before appeared in print.

. . . . . .

Early in the spring of 1893, a miner who was toiling alone at the farthest extremity of this big vein was suddenly startled by hearing the cry of a human voice, coming, apparently, from beyond the very wall which formed the end of the lead. The man uttered an answering cry and, with his heavy sledge poised in air, listened for a repetition of the thrilling sound.

"Surely I must have been mistaken," he mused, as he again lifted the ponderous hammer, but the next instant the steel sledge fell clattering to the rocky floor, as a distinctly audible cry pealed up from the jet black face of the far-reaching wall of ore: —

"Help! Help!"

"God above us," gasped the startled man, "there's some one entombed here," and, turning, he sprang away to give the alarm at the main shaft.

The boss foreman, with a gang in charge, happened to be descending in a big cage just as Miner Chessman appeared, and the excited man called upon them to stop.

"There's somebody buried alive at the end of the six-foot lead!" he panted; "come and help me rescue him," and before his startled superior could question him, Chessman turned and darted back toward the tunnel, his miner's lamp twinkling and dancing like a miniature star through the inky darkness.

The foreman rushed in pursuit with six strong men, eager for the rescue. At the end of the long excavation they found Chessman kneeling, his ear pressed firmly against the solid wall of iron ore, and his hand raised in a warning gesture of silence.

"He is there; right beyond the big column!" breathlessly declared the miner, as he seized his sledge once again, preparatory to beginning operations. But at this point the puzzled foreman stepped forward and laid his hand firmly upon Chessman's arm.

"What do you mean?" he slowly articulated, at the same time looking the trembling individual thus addressed squarely in the face, while the rescue party crowded around them. The big miner turned a wild, startled look upon his interrogator.

"Great God, man!" he gasped, and his breath sounded like the hiss of escaping steam, "you heard it — the cry for help?"

The foreman slowly shook his head. "No, I did not hear a cry, and furthermore, Chessman, the very suggestion is absurd. There is absolutely nothing there save a vein of solid iron ore, which extends for many feet beneath the ocean."

"But I tell you I heard a cry!" expostulated the miner. "Perhaps only a few inches separate us from some other lead."

His manner proclaimed the sincerity of his words, but Foreman Gouchy dubiously shook his head.

"I do not propose to argue the question with you," he answered. "You may have thought that you heard a cry, but I assure you that no living thing exists beyond that wall of ore, for there is no tunnel, lead, or shaft in that direction, as the sea is but a short distance above and beyond you; and, furthermore, a man's voice could never reach you through even eight inches of that solid mineral barrier."

A look of deep reproach filled big Tom Chessman's eyes, plainly showing how keenly he felt the insinuation of his superior. He turned without a word, and had raised his big sledge to resume his labor upon the rocky wall when the signal for "knocking

off" came, and, without so much as looking at any member of the party, Tom dropped his "mash" and started down the level toward the main shaft. His car, nearly filled with sparkling fragments of ore, stood upon the track which led to the main level, and it waited only the touch of a hand upon the brakes to release it and send it down the incline. Whether it was by accident or design that Tom released the brake-lever as he passed the car will never be positively known, but just as Chessman stepped in front of it the heavy load started, and the next moment the big man was stretched prone beneath the low-lying axle.

At once Mark Gouchy and his helpers sprang to Chessman's assistance. The heavy trucks were quickly pried up, while ready hands relieved the car of its burden of ore. But brave Tom was taken out unconscious, with a terrible gash across his temple, and for three days lay raging in wildest delirium.

"Help! Help!" he cried incessantly. And then: "I can hear the cry, Gouchy. A man is entombed beyond that wall."

Foreman Gouchy remained obdurate, however, and the six-foot lead was assigned to another miner.

Tim O'Connor had been working assiduously for several hours at the extremity of the vein, and had paused for a drink of water from a tin can near at hand, when he suddenly started, with the can half raised to his lips, and his eyes became riveted upon the black and glistening face of the ore wall. The Irishman's heart fairly missed a couple of beats, and a chill like ice crept up his spine; then, with a cry of alarm, he dropped the tin and dashed at breakneck speed down the level, while the echo of a human groan caused the air to tremble and vibrate for several seconds.

"Howly Mither," he gasped, "it's a ghost!" and he never stopped running until he had reached the toll-boy's shanty at the main shaft.

"Number Six is ha'nted!" he sputtered, and then, as the empty cage appeared, going up, Tim jumped on board, and has never since been seen in the vicinity of the big mine.

However, this sensational incident led to an investigation. The next morning two reliable men were stationed at the farthest extremity of the big lead, with instructions to ascertain, if possible, the occasion for all this alarm. For an entire day they waited,

listening in vain for some sound which should furnish a clew to the mystery. But none came, until, just previous to the hour when the "day shift" was about to quit work, one of the watchers suddenly raised his hand with a warning gesture.

Both men listened, and each distinctly heard a clicking sound, as of some one beyond the barrier picking at the iron. Then came a faint moan of bitter distress, followed by the distinctly audible sounds of a human voice, calling in agonized appeal: —

"Help! Help! God save me or I shall perish."

This cry was immediately followed by a sickening groan, as though the suffering victim had exhausted every energy in making this final call for aid. Then all became silent as the grave.

Immediately the two miners awoke to a realization of the fact that something must be done, and that, too, without delay.

"Go for help," cried one, as he seized his sledge, and, while that maddening echo still vibrated in his ears, he swung the ponderous hammer against the unyielding barrier. The result was amazing, for, while the sledge was raised for still another blow, the most indescribable sound came back to him, telling of agony and hope, blended in one short, tense wail of thankfulness.

Then, while his companion rushed for the outer shaft to spread the alarm, this sturdy miner toiled as he had never toiled before. Blow after blow fell in quick succession, the crushing force of each bringing a shattered segment of ore to the floor, until the man's lithe body was fairly reeking with perspiration and his supple muscles tingled with the violence of his exertion. Over a quarter of an hour had gone ere the sinews of steel began to show signs of relaxing, and for the first time Neil Maxam, panting for breath, drew his horny fingers across his sweat-bathed forehead, and, leaning upon the handle of his sledge, strained his ears to catch the sound of approaching footsteps.

Where was the relief party? Surely it was time for help to arrive!

Then he looked at the fragments of glistening ore that were heaped about him as a result of his labors, and, with a glad cry, he sprang to his task again just as a score of flickering lamps turned a corner of the lead one hundred feet away.

The rescue party was at hand!

Six months later four men might have been seen descending into the big iron mine of Maitland, led by the superintendent, and each bearing the section of some scientific instrument by which an investigation was to be made — for the mystery of the six-foot lead had not yet been solved.

The rescue party had worked incessantly for four days and nights, when it had been discovered that the long tunnel was approaching an end, underneath the waters of Illawarra coast, and though the ore found here was of a quality superior to that in any other portion of the mine, it became necessary to stop work, as the mine was in danger of being flooded and lost.

In any event, it was generally believed that further attempts at rescue would be unavailing, as the result would be reached too late. Thus the effort to find the author of that mysterious cry had been abandoned for several months when an inspector of mines, visiting the far end of Number Six, was startled by again hearing that plaintive cry for help.

As before, it appeared to come directly from the solid wall of ore. What was to be done? There was no disputing the sound. It was certainly the cry of a man, and that man was entombed somewhere beyond that rocky barrier. The inspector considered it his imperative duty to find out just where the prisoner was confined, and he set to work at once to carry that project into effect.

But the mine owners knew full well that but a very thin partition shut out the waters of the bay, and that further excavation at the end of the vein would speedily bring disaster upon them. Here was a puzzle indeed. The call for help could be heard at frequent intervals, coming from the very direction in which it appeared least possible for a human being to exist. In sheer desperation they finally called upon an aged scientist of Sydney, hoping that he might be able to advance some explanation.

The old professor came — he heard the cry — he pondered long and departed. Nothing was gained by his visit. The result of his investigations was expressed only by sundry shakings of his hoary head.

Later two gentlemen from an Australian university put in appearance. They, too, listened to the strange voice. They tapped upon the wall. They sounded with hammers, and they

took a series of measurements calculated to show their familiarity with the problem of reflected sound. Then they asked innumerable questions and — they, too, finally departed, having acknowledged to the management their inability to cope with the mystery.

But now there had appeared with their assistants two celebrated professors, one English and one German, who had been dispatched by their respective universities to make exhaustive study of The Haunted Vein, the remarkable history of which had been reported to them. These grave men came fully determined to fathom the secret of the Maitland mine or to spend the remainder of their days there in investigation.

When first they listened to the voice they, like their predecessors, declared that it came from beyond the barrier of ore.

"There is surely a very slight vibration near the face of the wall," proclaimed the German professor, who, in anticipation of the cry, had carefully arranged a very sensitive diaphragm close to the point from which the call had appeared to come.

They likewise took numerous measurements to satisfy themselves that the superintendent had been correct in asserting their proximity to the sea; they listened to that oft-repeated cry, and at last concluded that the sounds came from an entirely different source than was supposed. In other words, they explained to the superintendent that there was evidently some person imprisoned in a distant portion of the mine, whose voice was taken up and transmitted in some mysterious manner, through the vast system of tunnels and leads, to the point where it was finally echoed from the face of the wall; or that possibly some laborer or other person within the mine was victimizing them, by uttering at frequent intervals these cries, which were transmitted hence in like manner.

It was determined to test this theory with extreme care, and the officials caused every man to be withdrawn from the great excavation until the learned professors should have time to try still another experiment in support of this idea. A series of elaborate calculations followed. Every theory known to modern science for the measurement of repeated sound was advanced. And yet without success!

That call came once again, clear and distinct as before, at the

face of the wall where it had ever been heard, but at no other point was it distinguished by either of the scientists.

"Help! Help! Save me or I shall die!"

It was the distinctly articulated tone of a man's voice, pitched in that exhausted treble which clearly denoted the agony of the sufferer. Following it came a clicking sound, as of the contact of iron with iron, and both the venerable scientists speedily reverted to their original conclusion — that the cry did come from a suffering captive, and that the unknown was somewhere beyond that wall of impenetrable iron ore. But where?

In vain they arranged scientific instruments; they listened to the voice, they pondered over theories of heat, electric forces, and transmitted sound. After a fortnight of tireless application they realized that they must soon acknowledge to an expectant world the chagrin of their own defeat. This was indeed a mystery! But the Englishman was determined never to yield so long as there was a possibility of success. He arranged a very sensitive phonographic apparatus near the face of the wall, so as to catch the faintest sounds, and with extreme patience he waited for the cry. It came at last: —

"Help! Help!"

The scientist threw his electrical apparatus into action and bent forward to listen to the faintly articulated words. He was standing thus, his companions near at hand, when he was observed to throw up his arm as if to enjoin silence, and then his face became flushed with excitement as he heard the cry: —

"Thank God, you have come at last!"

Then there followed a confused murmur of voices, while a gleam of light flashed from the English professor's eye.

He had discovered the key to the mystery.

"This magnetic iron ore is but a natural telephone!" cried Professor Blake, his face beaming with satisfaction. "We have been listening to the cry of some prisoner who was doubtless confined where the natural conditions served as a perfect transmitter of sound. The vein of iron ore has been the conductor, and we have listened to a message that doubtless has passed through many miles of magnetite — perhaps, indeed, the sounds have come from the distant mines of Siberia —"

The German professor started.

"Somewhere I have read," he exclaimed, brightening, "that to the north of the great Ural Mountains in Russia, in the bleak Obdorsk region, there exists a valuable mine of superior magnetite, where prisoners are often confined by the order of the Czar. As these great veins of lodestone trend north and south, and as that section of Russia is almost due north of us, it is not at all improbable that your theory is the correct one."

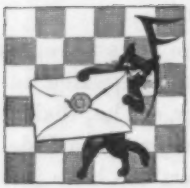
Howbeit, the cries ceased from that hour. The sounds reproduced from Professor Blake's phonographic cylinder revealed another voice than that of the supposed prisoner. The dialect plainly identified the speaker as being either a Russian or a Pole.

To-day, three years later, the two great universities have just completed their investigations. After an exhaustive search it was learned that an American, suspected of being implicated in a political revolt, had been confined in a cell in the great magnetite mine near Serka, that he had constantly called for help during his period of imprisonment, and that at last he had been released through the efforts of a Polish nobleman named Zaluski, who came to his cell and rescued him upon the very day and hour that the English professor had made his remarkable discovery.

The superstition of the average miner, however, is proverbial. In spite of the scientists the voices which sometimes echo faintly through deserted Number Six preclude any intrusion by these sturdy toilers upon the solitudes of The Haunted Vein.

An Old Maid's Wedding Trip.

BY JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS.



FOR some years I had said that I was going to be an old maid, but, familiar as the idea was, it gave me a shock to wake up one morning and find that I really was one; that the going to be was all over and done with, and that I had reached the actual fact. There had been four weddings in the family in the last few years, and now even Kat, who wouldn't be out till next winter, was beginning to have her miniature affairs. It was her asking me to chaperon a picnic that brought the fact home to me. If not a chaperon by the honorable promotion of matrimony, it seems I had earned the brevet title by virtue of thirty years, two wrinkles, and three gray hairs, and must wear it as meekly as I could. So I took a book to the picnic, and did a good deal of thinking behind its covers.

Men liked me, and had fun with me, but some way they always fell in love with Grace, and Margaret, and Della, and Nancy, and one by one these married off, leaving me higher and drier on the rocks of spinsterhood. The others were more or less pretty, but I wasn't even less, and I didn't blame the young men we knew for having eyes in their heads. And then who could fall in love with a girl whose name was — no, I'm just going to keep it to myself. It has mortified me enough, without putting it down in cold print. If I have to refer to myself by name, I'll choose the prettiest one in the back of the dictionary. Besides all this, I'm utterly unsentimental, as rather stout people are apt to be, and couldn't flirt to save my life. Why, Kat can pour streams of melted moonlight out of her eyes already, and reduce the heart of the average youth to jelly in ten minutes. Grace used to say that nobody flirted any more, that it was a horrid, countrified word suggestive of making eyes and getting behind fans; that now

you establish relations of friendly intimacy with a man. I suppose she knew, for she certainly had more — relations of friendly intimacy than any girl I ever heard of.

It was after Nancy had gone off in a hailstorm of rice that my great idea came to me. Why should I be deprived of the *trousseau*, and the presents, and — best of all — the trip, just because fate had denied me the bridegroom? I've heard families groan over the fuss and bother of weddings, but we always took ours easily and had unlimited fun out of them. I shall never forget Harold and Della dancing hand in hand under the arch of sweet peas, when they ought to have been upstairs getting dressed, singing:—

"Good morrow, good mother,
For I'm to be married to-day."

And no bride ever went off in such a shout of laughter, for the rice gave out, and old Eliza, who always was ingenious, came rushing in with a pan of vermicelli. Of course I couldn't have the ceremony, but the idea of the trip grew and grew in my mind till one day at breakfast I announced: —

"Father, four weeks from to-day I am going on my wedding journey, and meanwhile I shall be very busy with my *trousseau*. A check would save a good deal of time and trouble."

There was an amazed silence, which Kat broke by demanding, "Where did you get him?"

"There isn't any him," I answered, and explained my idea. Of course there was a great deal of laughing, and mother wasn't quite sure, but father said, "Go ahead," and filled out a check before he went to the office. I think it did occur to him that I had been rather crowded out these last few years.

That very day I bought some lovely fine Jones cambric and some lace and ribbon, and put a woman to work on that end of the *trousseau*. I was so tired of plain, sensible things with half a dozen tucks and a little ruffle of embroidery, bought entirely with reference to the laundress. Then I had a traveling dress made, and some dear thin dimities and batistes, and a Dresden silk that kept me awake three nights with the rapture of it. For years I had been choking down my love of dress with the stern fact that nothing was becoming to me, and that I was sentenced to blue serge, shirt waists, and sailors till I should be released by black

silk and a false front. Kat looked down on the whole scheme, and called it a "Lulu Warner trick" (an expression of contempt left over from childhood, when a horrid little girl of that name had lived next to us) to go off with all the money in the family, but everybody else took it as a delightful joke, and sent me the most ridiculous presents. A number of them came to see me off on the train, and Harold brought a big package of rice, saying that I might sprinkle it around to suit myself. Then they gave me their blessings and good wishes, and hoped I'd be happy in my new life, and the train started gaily out on my wedding journey.

I don't know anything more delicious than the close, cindery, velvet-and-bacteria odor of a sleeping car. It means travel and adventure, friends to run across, strangers to watch, bridal couples to make fun — no, I couldn't do that any longer, seeing that I was half a bridal couple myself. For two blissful hours I lay back in my section reveling in everything from the benign porter to the silken rustle that rewarded my slightest movement; then the serpent entered in with her daughter.

"Well, well, you haven't changed a particle. If this isn't the luckiest thing for Lulu and I! We were just wishing we could run into somebody nice. Who is with you?"

"Oh, I left my family behind," I answered, letting a cordial tone cover the fact that I made no room for them to sit down. "You look just the same, Mrs. Warner, but I should never have known Lulu."

"Well, it's a good many years," said Mrs. Warner. "I suppose you are going to the mountains, too? We can all go on together."

"My plans are rather uncertain," I answered guardedly. Mrs. Warner had no finger for pulse.

"You'll stop off at the Lake to-morrow morning, won't you?" she persisted.

"Mamma, we're blocking up the aisle," said Lulu.

"Perhaps we can make room here," I said, with an ineffectual tug at the things on the opposite seat, which resulted in nothing but a little stream of Harold's ridiculous rice from my bag.

"Oh, don't you bother. You can come and visit with us. We're right in the next section." And Mrs. Warner retreated, to

replace her bonnet with a deerstalker, and surround herself with paper novels.

I tried to forget them, but Mrs. Warner's perky voice spoiled the soothing rumble of the train, and Lulu's sulky face irritated me. Why couldn't they have gone any other day?

"It was a Lulu Warner trick," I thought, with an unwilling laugh.

The first call for dinner in the dining car roused me to the luxurious prospect of eating with the world running by the window for my amusement.

"Now, I'll tell you what you do," said a voice from the next section; "you come right in here and have supper with us. We brought ours along."

"Oh, no, indeed," I exclaimed, glancing at the sandwiches, wafers, and jam that were being spread out in their untempting stickiness; "I couldn't think of it."

"Sit right down," insisted Mrs. Warner. "We've got more than enough for we three, and it will save you a dollar. Stick that bag under the table, Lulu."

What could I do? I have no talent for polite rudeness, and I couldn't bring myself to use the other kind, so I shared Lulu's seat and napkin as gracefully as I could. A little later I was very thankful that I had. The porter, after hovering around some minutes, asked me persuasively if I wasn't going to the dining car, and when I said "no," went away looking perplexed and disappointed. Before long he was back with something in his arms.

"Lady said I was to keep 'em in water and give 'em to yeh in the dining kyar, but if yeh ain't goin'—" he said regretfully.

I lifted the tissue paper, and found a great bunch of bride roses and maiden hair, tied with white satin ribbon, from which dangled a card wishing me all happiness, "from Della and Harold." It was aggressively bridal, but Mrs. Warner admired it so unsuspiciously that I didn't explain. When I don't like people, I always want to keep to the weather.

"Harold is so dear and thoughtful," I said casually. "It was just like him to do this."

"I'm real glad Della did so well," said Mrs. Warner. "You

must tell me all about everybody. Isn't it nice we can go on together! We'll have lots of fun. How do you come to be all alone?"

"Oh, we stop here twenty minutes," I exclaimed, starting up suddenly. "I must take a little exercise. Thank you so much, Mrs. Warner. We will have our talk later." And I was gone before she could offer to come with me.

I walked briskly up and down the platform, not going very far from my car, for I never quite trust a train, even when its engine is detached. One of the many people doing the same thing looked at me intently as I passed, and when a third turn brought us face to face, we both stopped short.

"I knew it was!" he said, holding out his hand.

"Why, George Simpson!" I exclaimed. "What have you been doing all these years?"

"Working, — absolutely nothing else," he answered, falling into step beside me.

"A great mistake," I said.

"For a long time it was because I had to," he answered. "Then it grew into a habit, and now I'm taking a month's constitutional to try and break it off. I'm on a sort of bachelor wedding trip."

"Why, so am I," I cried, and told him all about it.

"We are two of the most sensible people I know," he said warmly, and then we both fell silent.

So he had never married. Was that Grace's doing? She had found him "too dreadfully steady" and had staved him off, much to father's and mother's disappointment, for they had liked him best out of all her motley collection. It had been a summer incident to her, perhaps an eight years' bitterness to him. He asked me about the rest of the family when we returned to the train, but carefully avoided her name, and I followed his lead. Then he told me all about his business, and I grew so interested in the future of pig iron that we talked till all the other passengers had retired behind their curtains. By the time that he went back to his car I had forgotten my neighbors, but when I curled up for the night the sound of their voices reached me through the thin wooden partition. Evidently we were head to head.

"Rice and bouquets, — well, maybe you're right, Lulu, but I don't see why she should be so mysterious about it," said Mrs. Warner, doing her best to whisper.

"They're always silly," was the lofty answer. "Everything was brand new, even her boots. You can't fool me on a bride. She probably made him stay in the smoking room all the afternoon. That's why she was so stiff and funny. He don't look exciting."

"He's got a real sensible face," mused Mrs. Warner. "I think she might have introduced us. She is thirty by this time, ain't she?"

"I do wish you wouldn't say 'ain't.' It's so dead common," said Lulu crossly.

"Well, isn't she, then?" was the unruffled answer.

"More than that, I guess," said Lulu, with a yawn. "Now let's stop talking. I want to go to sleep."

That was just like Lulu Warner. She always used to find out our secrets and shout them on the housetops or over the back fence. I went to sleep fully determined to explain everything in the morning, but when the porter's "Better git up, lady, if yeh want any breakfast" roused me, I found that we had passed the Lake, and the next section was empty.

It happened that George and I had chosen the same place for our first stop-over, and I began to feel the advantage of my three gray hairs, for without them we certainly couldn't have taken that long morning excursion together. If I was qualified to chaperon a picnic of twenty, I could chaperon one of two, and George evidently considered me old enough to do as I pleased, — or else did not give the matter a thought. Perhaps the fact that I might have been his sister-in-law made it seem more natural to him. We were to go on by the same train in the afternoon, but after that our ways separated. It was just before we started that a telegram was handed me, saying, "Best wishes for a happy honeymoon," and signed "D. and H." I turned laughing, and began reading it to George, only to find myself almost in the arms of Mrs. Warner and Lulu. By their expression, I knew that they had heard that absurd message.

"Look at this," I said, handing it to them. "Della is just as crazy as ever. She and Harold call this my wedding trip just because I happen to have some new clothes."

Just then "All aboard" was shouted, and I hurried away, though not too soon to hear a murmur of: —

"Speaking of fishy stories!" from Lulu. Four piercing eyes watched George help me into the bus.

"Those dreadful people!" I exclaimed impatiently, and put the telegram away without showing it.

The next few days were delicious. I came and went as I chose, and wore my pretty batistes when it was warm — I couldn't muster up courage enough for the Dresden silk, though I took it out several times — and made friends when I wanted to talk. It was such a comfort not to have anybody to get tired, and disagree about routes, and draw on my sympathies with neuralgia. But again the serpent. Coming into the hotel office one morning just after the stage had arrived, I saw two dreaded figures bending over the registry book.

"Lulu, she's registered the same way here, maiden name," said Mrs. Warner excitedly. "It's queer, to say the least."

I dodged around the nearest corner and hurried to my room. A bell boy was just coming away from it.

"Two ladies was asking for you," he said.

"A lady and her daughter?"

"Yes'm. I left 'em in the parlor."

There were ten minutes before the stage went on. I sealed the boy's mouth and added wings to his feet with a dollar, and when the last "All aboard" was called, I rushed out, bag and baggage. A friendly hand from above helped me up over the wheel to a top seat. Mrs. Warner and Lulu were not in sight, but the curtain of the parlor was hurriedly pulled back as we whirled by. I laughed to myself as I straightened my hat and drew on my gloves.

"You nearly missed it," said my neighbor. I turned with a start to find George Simpson beside me.

"I'd have followed on foot if I had," I answered emphatically. "That place was getting too — too crowded for me. There were so many bridal couples around that I was in danger of being taken for an old maid."

"No wonder you ran away," he said. "I thought you might be jumping your board bill."

We settled into a comfortable talk about people and places and

things. He wasn't one of those men who have got to be forever "swapping souls," as Kat calls it, and who make you listen to yards of tiresome theories and beliefs and sentiments. I can't endure heart problems, anyway. All this time, though he often spoke of the girls, he never mentioned Grace by name. Now and then I would find his eyes fixed on me with a far-away, remembering sort of a look, and I felt far sorrier for this quiet, cheerful, successful man of business than I should have for one who paraded his blighted life.

"This has been the best day of my wedding trip. We'll surely run across one another again," he said, with a smile and a hand-clasp that I knew were not all for me, when we separated that afternoon. He went on by rail, while I climbed into a high farm wagon and was driven way up to a little retreat in the mountains, half inn and half farmhouse, delightfully far from steam and electricity. The only drawback was that I had no one to exclaim to, — though I wasn't in the least lonely. I do despise women who never can do a thing without a man tagging along. My paradise lasted two days. Then, as I came in from a long walk, my landlady met me at the door, and I knew it had come.

"Yes'm, a lady and her daughter. I told them you had gone up the brook, and they started after you."

"I came home by the hill," I said wearily. A little fibbing and bribing, and I was off down the mountain in a light spring wagon in time to catch the train. I don't know what the good people thought of me, for I didn't try to make any plausible explanations. The boy who drove gave me some very curious glances, and when I brushed against him in getting out, I noticed that he discreetly laid one hand over the pocket where he kept his big silver watch. I had often wondered at the cleverness of the police in tracking criminals, but when I learned how hard it is to get away from two ordinary tourists, whose only mission is to bore you to death, I wondered that any fugitive ever does escape.

It was only two hours by rail to a famous summer hotel, and I looked out of the window with some interest as we drew in. Then I shrank back, almost with a shriek, for standing by the station in the summeriest of clothes, with fluffy parasols and flowery hats, and the crowning glory of an attendant young man, stood

Mrs. Warner and Lulu. I sat huddled down in my corner, utterly bewildered, while people and luggage streamed past my window. My own trunk joined the procession, upside down, Dresden silk and all, and I made no move. I could stand the ordinary complications of travel, but this was too uncanny. I could not take my eyes off them as they strolled and chattered and posed. Just as the train started, I saw Lulu touch her mother's arm and nod towards my window. I shut my eyes and waited for them, but once more I had escaped. The conductor looked at me curiously.

"Weren't you going to get off at the last station?" he asked.

"I decided to go straight on," I said, with dignity.

"Where to?" was the not unnatural question.

"I haven't quite decided. Will you bring me a folder?" I chose a place at random, and arrived at seven o'clock that night, tired, hungry, and for the first time forlorn. I had quite made up my mind to find Mrs. Warner and Lulu awaiting me, but George Simpson was a surprise. It is wonderful how a good supper and a good friend can restore your self-respect. The next morning I could again see the funny side of the situation, even if I couldn't understand it altogether. If there was a short cut down from the mountain, why had my landlady concealed it from me?

In the afternoon George and I went off for a long walk, and I told him all about the Warners' mysterious chase, and the talk they might be spreading about me.

"I should think I was old enough to go anywhere without comment," I said impatiently. George had laughed a great deal during my tale, but now he looked at me in a serious, kindly little way, as though he were thinking of Grace.

"Eight years!" he said irrelevantly. "We were very good friends then, but it seems to me I was rather gone on Margaret."

"Why, it was Grace!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, so it was. Yes, I meant Grace," he said half absently. "She was the brown-eyed one."

I stared blankly. I hadn't a word to say.

"I wish I had known you better then," he went on. "Do you suppose it is too late to begin now?"

"What do you mean?" I asked in surprise.

"The Rev. Dr. Grayson is at the hotel," he answered, taking one of my hands. "It would stop all the gossip."

"And there's the Dresden silk. I've never even had it on," I said, after a pause.

It was late in the afternoon when we reached the hotel. All unsuspicious, I stopped at the desk for my key.

"There are two ladies waiting to see you," said the clerk.

I turned and walked deliberately into the parlor, resolved to have it out, and found myself face to face with my mother and Kat. I rushed towards them, relieved and delighted, but they met me with cold gravity.

"Is anything the matter?" I exclaimed, with dreadful visions of bankruptcy and sudden death.

"That's what we want to know," said Kat. The every-day tone of her voice reassured me.

"Well, I'm awfully glad to see you," I went on.

"Our idea was to join you and go on for a month or two, perhaps up to Quebec," my mother said in a hurt tone. "Father thought we'd all enjoy it. But we have wasted so much time following you around, I don't know that I care to go any farther."

"You needn't look so puzzled," said Kat; "you know perfectly well that every time we caught up with you, you raced out and jumped on a stage, or a train, or something, and gave us the slip. Mrs. Warner seemed to think that if you weren't on your wedding trip you ought to be, so we said as little as possible. Who is this little friend you're touring around with?"

"You don't mean you were the two ladies!" I burst out.

"We try to appear as such," was the cutting answer.

Well, finally it was all explained, and Kat laughed till she cried, but mother never could see anything funny in it. They had tried to telegraph me, but my movements had been so erratic that I had not received the messages. Mother was still regretting that she had ever consented to this crazy trip of mine and wondering how we could stop Mrs. Warner's tongue, when George came in. In ten minutes everything was all straightened out.

One morning, a few days later, I put on the Dresden silk, and Dr. Grayson came into our private parlor and married us. Then

I changed back to my traveling dress, and started on my wedding trip all over again.

"Mattie," George began — there, I didn't mean to tell my name, but, after all, it isn't any worse than Simpson. "Mattie, the honeymoon is doing a rushing business this month. This makes the third for us two."

"All the old maids in town will be taking solitary wedding trips when they hear of it," I answered, laughing. "But how will it ever get straightened out with the Warners?"

"Oh, they'll think they were right from the first," said George. "You know you can't fool Lulu on a bride!"

The Official Report.

BY THADDEUS M. LAKEWOOD.

T might truly have been styled a military dinner, for, aside from the host and hostess and three young society buds, the entire party was made up of army officers and their wives. The one other exception was only apparent, for Mr. Wright belonged to the body of war, although his duties were those of the Department at Washington, and not of the field.

Mr. and Mrs. Powell had, during the past five summers, been the guests of as many army posts throughout the West, and their dinner was the outward sign of sincere appreciation of many similar hospitalities extended by their guests of the evening. It had proved an unqualified success, and now, as the coffee was served, the stories of army life, so gratifying to Mrs. Powell's love of things military, were going the rounds.

Colonel Hapgood had told of the stirring times in the memorable campaign with Custer; Major Hinton, with his usual gallantry, had declared what a blessing women were to a soldier's life; while of the younger division, Lieutenant Savage, true to his branch of the service, let out the secret of how the infantry officers had, the year previous, outwitted their brethren of the cavalry at the Christmas ball. Mr. Wright, when called upon, stated that, owing to his position in the Department, his knowledge of the army was purely documentary, and was made up entirely from the reports of the several commanding officers. Of its social life he knew little or nothing, and as official business was rather dry talking, he asked that the duty of story telling might be transferred to one better posted in garrison life — Colonel Keller.

The Colonel was one of those old school officers who never flinched when duty called, whether it was on the field of battle

or in the social arena, and this summons found him alert to respond.

"Mr. Wright," he began, "is correct when he says that one who obtains his knowledge of army life from official reports knows very little of its inward workings and social life. In fact, some of these reports, although strictly in accordance with regulations, if read between the lines would convey a great deal more than one would infer from the stiff, official wording. It is upon a report that I made over ten years ago that I now base my story.

"As a usual thing, there is nothing of so little use to the army in the West as a graduate of West Point. He arrives on the full tide of his glory, and is harder to break in than an Indian pony; although I will say that, with a few exceptions, these same raw recruits, after a couple of years' training, turn out to be good officers and an honor to the service.

"Lieutenant Dorsey — for reasons that will appear later, I have withheld his real name — was an exception to the rank and file of these youngsters, inasmuch as he was both popular and a good officer from the day he joined us. He was also a thorough gentleman, and it was not a month before he was the favorite of the Fort; petted by the ladies, and admired and looked up to by the men. Strange to say, his head was not turned, and as he had the very first year distinguished himself in the field, I looked upon him as the most promising officer in my command.

"Major Hinton has spoken of the good influence of women on the lives of those in an army post, and I agree with him. There are, however, exceptions to every rule, and such was the case in my story, for it was a woman who spoiled a career which from the start promised so much.

"It was the third summer after Lieutenant Dorsey had joined us that a young woman, whose name I shall not mention, came to visit the wife of one of the captains. I recall having read somewhere, 'Wherever youth and maiden are, there is a certainty of romance, and a chance of tragedy.' There was surely romance in this case, for at the end of the summer, when she returned to her home in the East, she took the heart of my favorite lieutenant with her. It was to my wife that he shortly afterwards confided the secret of the engagement.

"All during that winter there was not a happier or more jovial officer in the fort than he, and when in the spring his application for leave was granted, he left for the East, followed by the good wishes of every officer and man in the command.

"His leave was for four months, but just three weeks from the time of his departure, he again stood before me and reported for duty — a changed man. From the moment that I looked into his eyes I knew something of serious import had occurred; but the chance to invite his confidence seemed never to present itself, so it was not until a couple of months afterwards that I learned the true facts. The details came from my wife, who had written for particulars to a former school friend in the East. It was the old story: A young girl of more or less romantic turn of mind had become enamored with army life, upon her visit to the fort, and had fallen in love, to a greater or less extent, with a good-looking young officer, the affair ending in an engagement. But a winter at home and a more tempting offer, from a financial point of view, had brought a change of mind, and to be the wife of an army officer, with a small salary, was no longer to her liking.

"Woman-like, however, she was pleased by his devotion, and instead of breaking the engagement, she allowed him to continue writing such letters as might be expected from a man so thoroughly in love. One thing, however, he omitted to write. He did not tell her of his leave of absence, as he wished to surprise her, — and he did.

"What occurred at the meeting no one in the command ever knew, but the man who returned to us 'for duty' was but a poor substitute for the light-hearted favorite who had so recently left us. The ladies attempted, by every womanly expedient, to cheer him and to bring him out of himself; the men tried, sometimes clumsily, but always sincerely, to show their sympathy and regard. It was useless,— the arrow had gone home, and the wound would not heal.

"What young Dorsey wanted above all else was, apparently, to be left alone; and when not on duty he would shut himself in his quarters and remain invisible to every one. Nor was this the most serious change. The entire character of the man seemed transformed. The once responsible and reliable officer became

careless and untrustworthy; and upon one occasion he would have sacrificed the lives of a number of his men had it not been for the good judgment of his first sergeant.

"When the outbreak of the Sioux, early in the spring, required immediate attention, it so happened that his troop was the only one that could be despatched without delay. His commander was on leave and he, being senior lieutenant, would naturally have been placed in command, but I felt that I could no longer trust him; and I confess it was one of the hardest duties of my career as a soldier, to order him on special duty, and send away the troop in command of his junior. Poor fellow! the lesson was needed, but it cut deeply. For a time I feared that he would simply let himself sink into the depths of despondency. It must have been specially galling to his spirit when, after a hard campaign, the command came home covered with glory, a share of which might have been his.

"Perhaps just that bitter medicine was needed as a tonic to his pride. At any rate, during the weeks of quiet that followed, I noticed in him a decided change for the better, more determination and resolve. The improvement was so marked that I decided to give him another trial. So one day when it became necessary to send a small detachment to bring in a party of braves who had left the reservation, I put him in command, and he departed with his first and second sergeants and twenty-five men.

"It was the second afternoon after their departure that the officer of the day rushed into my office and reported that a messenger had just arrived with the news that a fight had taken place, and that Lieutenant Dorsey had been killed, but none of the men had been injured. At once I ordered that the ambulance be sent forward under guard, with instructions for the first sergeant to return immediately with his command.

"It had been a long time since an officer had been brought home wrapped in the colors, and as the ambulance was driven down the line of officers' quarters, every head was uncovered. But sentiment and duty do not go hand in hand. Upon the receipt of the news of the death, I had immediately wired department headquarters that Lieutenant Dorsey had been killed in an engagement that day, with no other loss of life. And upon the

arrival of the remains, I had at once ordered the officer in command to make his report.

"With the death of the lieutenant the command devolved upon his first sergeant, a man well advanced in years, who worshiped the very ground upon which his lieutenant walked. It seemed only natural, then, when describing the death of his favorite officer, before the members of my staff, that at times his voice would fail him, and tears dim his eyes.

"'It was just the day after we left,' he said, standing, attentive, 'that we came upon their deserted camp. From signs we knew that they did not have much the start of us, and by noon we had located them. They had taken a position among a lot of rocks, and evidently intended to fight. The lieutenant called the second sergeant and myself aside, and said: "The only way to get those rascals out is to charge them. I shall lead. Follow me. Continue the pursuit until every one is taken,— alive, if possible!" We wheeled into line, but before we were fairly ready, he gave the word, and putting the spurs into his horse, bounded away far in the lead. We went after him as fast as possible, but he distanced us, and was far in advance when they opened fire. They fired only about six shots in all, and I saw him discharge his revolver twice in return, and then fall from the saddle. When we reached him he was dead, shot through the heart. I stopped to make the examination, while the boys continued the pursuit, as ordered. They captured four, wounding one. When the men returned, I sent a private to report the engagement and request the ambulance.'

"That was a gloomy afternoon, and as I sat alone in my office looking over the official report written by my clerk and handed me for correction and signature, I must acknowledge that I dwelt upon the death of my officer with feelings of the deepest sorrow. I forgot his failings of the past year, and thought only of the bright young fellow whose life had promised so much. It is no wonder that I wrote after the closing lines of the report, 'An officer who was an honor to the service, and died a soldier's death in the performance of his duty.'

"Just as I took up my pen preparatory to signing the document, my orderly entered and announced that Sergeant Hooper desired

to see me. Hooper was the sergeant who had made the report of the lieutenant's death, and thinking that he might have some favor to ask, I ordered that he be shown in. He appeared, carrying under his arm a bundle wrapped in an old newspaper.

"'I know I should report to the officer of the day,' he said, 'but what I have to say is something about the lieutenant's death, and I think I should tell it to you alone.'

"'Something you omitted from your report?' I asked, and my voice must have sounded rather stern. For to withhold facts in such a case was a grave offense.

"'Yes, sir. But what I did not relate before your staff I intended to tell you,' and the same tremor was noticeable in his voice as when he reported the death. 'The facts of the fight are just as I related them. When I bent over the lieutenant he was dead. I took off his coat, and when the boys returned we wrapped the standard about him, and went into camp to await the ambulance. The coat I have here,' and he undid the string of the bundle he carried under his arm. 'It is the only evidence I withheld from my report.'

"He unfolded the coat, and held it up without a word. As I took it from him, turning it this way and that, to get the light upon it, something fell from the inner left-hand pocket to the floor. Very reverently the sergeant stooped and gathered up — what? Simply a delicate gold rim, a few scraps of blood-stained velvet, and what seemed the fragments of the miniature portrait of a woman, painted upon porcelain. Yet though shattered beyond recognition, I think that as we viewed it silently, neither of us doubted whose picture, worn to the last over the young officer's heart, had been destroyed by the bullet that took his life.

"Replacing the remains of the portrait, I held up the coat so that I could see the hole through which the bullet had gone. The blood had long since dried, leaving its stain, but that was not all — the cloth was badly burned.

"The garment slipped from my nerveless grasp, as a hundred thoughts flashed through my mind, and seizing Hooper by the shoulders, I cried: —

"'Your report! You said no one was near him.'

"'I told the truth, sir,' he replied, and his head was bowed for the first time.

"'My God!' I breathed, 'you don't mean —'

"There were tears in his eyes as he slowly replied, 'Yes, sir; the lieutenant shot himself.'

"It must have been some hours later when an orderly appeared and asked if the report was ready to be forwarded, as the messenger had been awaiting it for some time. Where had my thoughts been during those hours? In the past, recalling some little act or saying of a brave young soldier who had made his last march.

"I picked up the report and reread the lines I had added. Should I change them, giving the true facts and thereby cloud his memory? Or should I send it as it stood?

"Ladies and gentlemen, what would you have done in my place?"

The Black Cat Prize Stories.

$2,600.00 Cash.

The result of the prize story contest announced by the publishers of THE BLACK CAT last November, and which closed March 31, is given below. Some idea of the universal interest manifested in this contest, and of the widespread popularity of THE BLACK CAT, may be gathered from the fact that not only were manuscripts submitted from every State in the Union, but that Canada, Mexico, South America, Australia, India, England, and also the continent of Europe, were represented by hundreds of contestants. Every manuscript of the thousands received was critically read, and in reaching the result here announced, which required the continuous labors of the editorial force for nearly four weeks, the name or reputation of a writer received no consideration whatever, the sole aim and object being to select the **best stories** according to the published requirements. For reasons given below the amount of the cash awards has been increased from $2,100.00 to $2,600.00. This latter sum was promptly paid by certified checks on the International Trust Co., Boston, Mass., as will be seen by reference to the following pages.

These are the successful contestants:—

1st Prize,	$1,000.	**A Celestial Crime.** Charles Stuart Pratt, Warner, N. H.
2d Prize,	$500.	**"The Heart of God."** Joanna E. Wood, Philadelphia, Pa.
3d Prize,	$300.	**For Dear Old Yale.** James Langston, New York, N. Y.
4th Prize,	$200.	**Her Bare Foot.** William C. Hudson, Fordham, New York, N. Y.
5th Prize.		*The following six stories were deemed of equal merit, and instead of dividing the fifth prize of $100, according to the usual custom, or deciding the matter by lot, the full sum of $100 was awarded to each author, thus increasing the total amount of prize money from $2,100.00 to $2,600.00.*
	$100.	**A Geometrical Design.** Mary Foote Arnold, Terre Haute, Ind.
	$100.	**Ezra Collingford's Figure 4 Trap.** William Maynadier Browne, Readville, Mass.
	$100.	**Sombre.** John M. Ellicott, U. S. N., Mare Island, Calif.
	$100.	**In the Cabin of the Ben Bolt.** Bert Leston Taylor, Duluth, Minn.
	$100.	**His Millionaire Client.** Sallie Pate Steen, South Enid, Oklahoma.
	$100.	**Melted Melody.** James J. McEvilly, Washington, D. C.
Total,	$2,600.	

The above stories are not merely prize stories in name; they are prize stories in fact. A Celestial Crime, "The Heart of God," as well as others, are masterpieces of the story-teller's art, and the publishers of THE BLACK CAT will at any time pay equally good prices for equally good stories—for stories as original, as fascinating, and as full of human interest.

Among the manuscripts were found also a number of excellent tales which, with slight alterations, would be adapted to our use. These we hope to acquire by purchase, and to that end have already communicated with their authors. The unavailable stories have been returned to their authors with a copy of this announcement. The publication of the prize stories will begin in the July number, and certainly in no other way can 50 cents bring so large an amount of enjoyment to the lovers of fascinating tales cleverly told, as when invested in a year's subscription to THE BLACK CAT.

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